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LETTER DATED 27 MARCH 1998 FROM THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMISSION ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL PURSUANT TO PARAGRAPH 9 (b) (i) OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 687 (1991) ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In accordance with the intention reported to the Security Council, and the endorsement of the Council, I visited Baghdad from 22 to 26 March 1998. As you are aware, the Special Commission will submit its semi-annual report to the Security Council on 11 April 1998. Thus, the present report is a brief account of this most recent visit to Baghdad.

This was my first visit to Baghdad since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq on 23 February 1998, which ended the crisis regarding inspections of Iraq's Presidential sites.

On this visit to Baghdad, I was accompanied by three Commissioners: Professor Marjatta Rautio (Finland), Lieutenant Colonel GianPiero Perrone (Italy) and Major General Hideyo Kurata (Japan), as well as by certain senior officials of the permanent staff of the Commission in New York.

The Iraqi side was represented by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Tariq Aziz. He was supported by a number of ministers and senior military and civilian officials.

Two plenary meetings were held, one on 23 March and one on 24 March 1998. In addition, on 23 and 25 March, two separate meetings on technical issues were held with General Amer Rashid, the Minister of Oil, who is also responsible for the chemical weapons and missile areas. On 24 March, I also visited Nibai, some 30 kilometres south of Baghdad, with General Amer Rashid, where a United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) team and the Iraqi side are currently excavating the remnants of the unilaterally destroyed special missile warheads.

The discussions focused on the results of the technical evaluation meetings on the accounting of special missile warheads and on the chemical warfare agent VX, which had been conducted in Baghdad at the beginning of February 1998.

We also discussed the relationship between UNSCOM and Iraq, in particular, the developments regarding inspection of sensitive sites and some aspects of the ongoing monitoring and verification system. Furthermore, we addressed the steps and practical work required of both sides in order to bring to a conclusion the outstanding issues in the various weapons areas.

I transmit herewith a brief report on the discussions held in Baghdad this week (see annex). I would be grateful if you could bring this letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Richard BUTLER

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Annex

Report on the visit to Baghdad from 22 to 26 March 1998 by the Executive Chairman of the Special Commission established by the Security Council under paragraph 9 (b) (i) of Security Council resolution 687 (1991)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The discussions between the Deputy Prime Minister and the Executive Chairman took place in two plenary meetings. Additionally, two separate meetings on technical issues were held with the Minister of Oil, General Amer Rashid.

2. The discussions were, for the most part, devoted to technical issues, in particular, the results of the technical evaluation meetings on special missile warheads and the chemical warfare agent VX, as well as the relationship between the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and Iraq. Other operational issues, including the use of airfields in Iraq, were also raised and discussed briefly.

II. POLICY DISCUSSIONS

A. Special warheads

3. Both sides recognized that the technical evaluation meeting on special missile warheads had been an important step in clearing up the accounting for the special warheads, but some work remained to be done. The Deputy Prime Minister underlined the great importance Iraq attached to the technical evaluation meetings, which he said should be held in a spirit of transparency, efficiency and professionalism.

4. Both sides made technical presentations on their evaluations of the current status of the accounting for the special missile warheads. General Amer Rashid provided an explanation of the chart he had given to the Executive Chairman on this accounting. He also referred to the progress made in the excavation conducted by both sides on the warhead remnants unilaterally destroyed by Iraq in the summer of 1991.

5. The Commission's experts made an oral presentation of the Commission's concerns regarding the remaining gaps in the accounting for the special missile warheads. They included the discrepancies which appeared to exist regarding the timing and methodology of the unilateral destruction, in particular after the revelation by Iraq, in 1997, of an additional destruction site at Nibai.

6. Upon the request of the Executive Chairman, General Amer Rashid made an oral statement on the timing of the unilateral destruction of special warheads (biological and chemical) undertaken by Iraq in the summer of 1991. General Amer Rashid also provided a written statement to the Executive Chairman. In that statement, he declared that no destruction of special warheads had

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taken place outside the period from 9 to 11 July 1991. General Amer Rashid also gave an oral presentation on the methodology of the destruction at Nibai. These questions had already been raised by the Commission during the technical evaluation meeting on special warheads, without a satisfactory response being received from Iraq.

7. The Executive Chairman said that this new information should facilitate the work of the Special Commission in the verification and accounting for the special missile warheads.

8. On the missile area as a whole, in response to questions put by Mr. Tariq Aziz, the Executive Chairman reiterated that certain other major issues remained to be resolved, such as the indigenous production of missile engines and the full accounting of missile propellants.

9. It was agreed that a further technical evaluation meeting on missile warheads should also address these issues, hopefully at the end of April. In parallel, the Commission would conduct inspections, interviews and other activities to continue its verification of Iraq's declarations on these issues.

B. Chemical agent VX

10. The discussion then moved to the second item: the chemical agent VX. The Special Commission was still trying to verify that, as stated by Iraq, this agent had not been produced on an industrial scale nor had it been weaponized by Iraq. However, the assessment of the technical evaluation meeting on this matter had been that Iraq had the capability to produce and weaponize large quantities of VX. Therefore, further information and documentation from Iraq was needed.

11. The Deputy Prime Minister challenged the methodology used by the Commission to reach that assessment. He could not accept that, because Iraq had possessed the necessary equipment and had achieved a high level of expertise in the production of other chemical weapons, this necessarily led to the same conclusion in respect of VX. Iraq was a developing country, achieving success in some areas and not in others. He reiterated that Iraq had failed to produce VX on an industrial scale and had not weaponized it. It was true that Iraq had procured important quantities of VX precursors, but it had not succeeded in using them for the production of VX on a scale suitable for military use.

12. The Executive Chairman said that the Special Commission was not merely extrapolating, but was employing the range of information at its disposal to verify the declarations made by Iraq. The Deputy Prime Minister proposed that a further technical evaluation meeting be held on the entire issue of VX in the near future. The Executive Cnairman agreed to convene such a meeting, hopefully at the beginning of May.

13. The Executive Chairman reiterated, however, that there were still other major outstanding issues in the chemical area, such as material balance of all chemical munitions and all equipment for the production of chemical weapons. He

proposed to address these issues in conjunction with further work on the question of VX. This would be the most effective procedure.

14. The Deputy Prime Minister said he preferred to concentrate all the immediate efforts on completing the issue of VX first, and thereafter addressing the other remaining issues. He said the remaining issues could be dealt with under monitoring, as the Commission could go everywhere and check every item in the chemical factories of Iraq.

15. The Executive Chairman agreed that a further technical evaluation meeting would be confined to the issue of VX, but said that the Commission would, in the meantime, conduct inspections and other activities on the other chemical weapons issues. The Iraqi side accepted this approach.

C. Biological weapons

16. It was agreed not to discuss this subject until the technical evaluation meeting presently under way in Vienna had completed its work.

D. Operational issues

17. In September and December 1997, and in the January 1998 meeting in Baghdad, the Executive Chairman had raised with the Deputy Prime Minister the right of the Commission to use Rasheed airbase, where its helicopter operations were based, for its fixed-wing aircraft, as well as other airfields throughout Iraq, such as Basrah.

18. The Deputy Prime Minister said there were still difficulties in allowing the landing of the Commission's aircraft at Rasheed airbase. Iraq was still suffering under sanctions and, for that reason, Iraq did not want to allow the Commission the convenience of using Rasheed airbase for its fixed-wing aircraft. For security reasons, Basrah airport remained closed. The Deputy Prime Minister said, however, that we could return to the subject at a later stage.

19. The Deputy Prime Minister then asked the Executive Chairman whether some of the used vehicles of the Commission which had now been replaced by new vehicles could be given to Iraq for use by the National Monitoring Directorate. The Directorate's vehicles were in such poor condition that it was difficult for them to provide adequate support for the Commission's activities. The Executive Chairman said he would consider the matter.

20. The Executive Chairman raised with the Deputy Prime Minister, in general, and with General Amer Rashid in particular, the problems associated with Iraq's use of the components of Volga missiles in the development of its Al-Samoud missiles. These problems impinged upon the Commission's ongoing monitoring and verification responsibilities and on the question of possible alteration of the capability of the Volga missiles. The Iraqi side did not accept the Commission's contentions. Further consideration of these matters will take place.

III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMISSION AND IRAQ

21. The Executive Chairman expressed his satisfaction at the new spirit of cooperation between both sides which had been evident since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of 23 February 1998. In particular, he referred to the inspections conducted at the beginning of March 1998, in which an UNSCOM team had conducted a series of inspections to sites declared by Iraq as sensitive. The revised Modalities for inspection of sensitive sites of 22 June 1996 had been applied correctly. The UNSCOM team had been granted access to all the sites, including Iraq's Ministry of Defence, and using an expanded team. The Executive Chairman expressed his hope that such a level of cooperation from Iraq would be maintained in future inspections, as it would create the appropriate environment for the conduct and conclusion of the disarmament tasks.

22. The Deputy Prime Minister said that the inspection of sensitive sites referred to by the Executive Chairman had been conducted by UNSCOM in a professional and correct manner, and that Iraq had provided full access and cooperation. He said future arrangements would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

23. With regard to the first entry to the eight Presidential sites, the Executive Chairman and the Deputy Prime Minister stated that both sides were ready to implement, as soon as possible, the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Secretary-General and the Republic of Iraq on 23 February 1998, and to fulfil their respective obligations.

24. Having agreed to await the results of the biological weapons technical evaluation meeting before determining what, if any, further action would be required, the Executive Chairman and the Deputy Prime Minister agreed that such action might include the possibility of another technical evaluation meeting in the near future.

25. At the conclusion of the discussions, it was agreed that the Executive Chairman would visit Baghdad again in early June 1998, in order to review the progress of the work in the various weapons areas.